

As I said at the beginning, I highly recommend this book. If you take the time to read it and study it, you will not regret it.

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### **On Nationality**

David Miller

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Even if nationalism itself is not on the rise, as some say, its study certainly is. One aspect that has received too little attention is the intimate relation between nationalism and forms of economic collectivism—especially socialism and welfare statism. This is no idle academic matter: the horrors wrought by the National Socialist German Workers' Party, popularly known as the Nazis, may be directly related to their fusion of two illiberal ideals, socialism and nationalism; and the ferocity of the current national conflicts in the Balkans and Eastern Europe may be traceable to the corrosive effects of socialist institutions on social order and the inclination toward peaceful cooperation.

A few classical liberals, such as the century's leading critic of socialism, Ludwig von Mises, have examined the connection between the two phenomena. As Mises (1983: 77) noted from Vienna in 1919, following the First World War and the fall of the multinational Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy: "Whoever wants peace among nations must seek to limit the state and its influence most strictly." When resources are owned or controlled by the state, rather than subject to several property and freely tradable on the market, then groups will come into conflict over how those resources will be deployed. Under systems of state ownership or control, one solution must be chosen for all, rather than letting individuals and groups choose for themselves, meaning that for some to win others must lose. When the conflict is between national groups that make claims on the full allegiance of their members, the conflict is especially dangerous, for the possibility of compromise or reciprocity is diminished. Nationalism tends to be jealous of cross-cutting interests—which allow individuals to win some even as they lose others. For one group to triumph, others must be suppressed, and, as Mises (*ibid.*: 56) observed, "Where only the choice is open either oneself to suppress or to be suppressed, one easily decides for the former." As game theorists would point out, in the "game" of socialism, suppression of other groups is the "dominant" strategy.

F. A. Hayek, whose classic work *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) was a shot across the bow of triumphal statism, connected socialism to primitive tribalism and a yearning for the solidarity and the morality of small groups, a yearning which, if extended much beyond the family, would prove incompatible with the requirements of the extended market order. The

great novelist Robert Musil (1990 [1921]: 109), another Austrian critic of both nationalism and socialism, observed that socialism is “stuck in the ethics of fraternity.” The morality appropriate for family members is, however, quite different from that appropriate for governing the relations of the countless strangers one encounters in an extended order.

Recently a distinguished socialist theorist, David Miller of Nuffield College, Oxford, has turned his attention to the issue of nationalism and statism, and has arrived at an analysis similar to that of the classical liberals. Miller recognizes the same choices, but embraces nationalist collectivism rather than cosmopolitan individualism. Whereas Mises and Hayek rejected statism and embraced free markets in the name of pluralism and harmony among national (and other) groups, Miller seeks to bolster socialism (or his second best, welfare statism) by means of a revived nationalism. As Miller points out in his new book *On Nationality*, “the redistributive policies of the kind favoured by socialists are likely to demand a considerable degree of social solidarity if they are to win popular consent, and for that reason socialists should be more strongly committed than classical liberals to the nation-state as an institution that can make such solidarity politically effective” (p. 92).

Miller candidly admits that problems of conflict and instability associated with coercive redistribution “might be resolved by slimming down the obligations of citizenship—turning the state into something closer to a minimal state—or by making state and nation coincide more closely” (p. 72). Miller opts unequivocally for the latter, whereas classical liberals choose the former. In opting for redistributive statism over constitutionally limited government and free markets, Miller recognizes that his commitment to socialism or welfare statism obliges him to embrace nationalism, as well.

What is especially remarkable is that Miller dismisses with open contempt cosmopolitanism and the classical liberal prescription for group conflicts—“slimming down the obligations of citizenship,” but ultimately falls back on classical liberal arguments to bolster his own socialist and nationalist position. Arguing against a world socialist state and obligations of international redistribution, Miller appeals to respect for the “autonomy of other nations” which “involves treating them as responsible for decisions they may make about resource use” (p. 108), without, apparently, noting that he is forced to adopt—in defense of national socialism—a core liberal argument against socialism per se, that private property makes rights and responsibility coordinate features of market resource allocation. The classical liberal alternative is only brought in as an element in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: if we were to reject nationalism, then we would have to embrace free movements of individuals and free trade of goods, but that would be, Miller believes, absurd. Miller is reduced to arguing in a circle: we have national obligations that ground our obligations to the welfare state, and we have obligations to the welfare state that ground our national obligations.

Of perhaps the greatest significance in this interesting book is the way in which Miller applies the nationality principle to the defense of the contemporary national welfare state, a defense that sheds light on the rise of anti-immigrant violence in Europe as well as on the resentment of immigrants in the American welfare state, such as was revealed by California's Proposition 187 (denying welfare benefits to immigrants). Harvard philosopher John Rawls had offered an influential defense of redistribution in his *A Theory of Justice*, in which divergences from complete equality were to be allowed only if those very inequalities were "to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged" (Rawls 1971: 302). Inequalities not so justified are to be eliminated through redistributive policies. This argument has become in recent years a standard defense of the coercively redistributive state. But just *who* is considered to be the "least advantaged," whose disadvantage provides the benchmark, matters a great deal; is the least advantaged a Somali goatherder or a Mississippi sharecropper? Rawls never adequately answers what determines the boundaries drawn around the groups over which his redistributivist principles are to apply, so Miller seeks to complete the Rawlsian argument: it is nationality that provides the demarcation criterion. Since Miller believes that "nations are like teams" (p. 18), it makes sense that the benefits of teamwork be limited only to the members of the team. Miller ignores two problems with his comparison: first, teams are voluntary associations, the members of which choose to cooperate, whereas states are not; and second, so conceived, the various "teams" that are nation-states will necessarily be in competition, and, as we know, "teams" with the powers of states can compete through organized violence of a most horrifying sort.

If welfare benefits are to be limited to conationals, then the issue of controls on immigration and the free flow of peoples becomes especially important. Mises dealt with these issues quite prophetically in his 1919 study. He first pointed out that "internationalist" socialism could not avoid national conflicts without jettisoning democracy. But he went further and recognized earlier than others that

the realization of socialism is also possible, however, otherwise than through a world state. We can imagine a series of independent socialist political systems—perhaps nationally unified states—existing side by side without there being a common management of world production. . . . In a socialism of that kind, national antagonisms will not only not be made milder in comparison with the situation in the liberal economic order but will be considerably sharpened. The migration problem would lose nothing of its capacity to create conflicts between peoples. The individual states would perhaps not completely shut themselves off from immigration, but they would not allow immigrants to acquire residence status and to acquire a full share of the fruits of national production. A kind of international migrant-worker system would arise" [Mises 1983 (1919): 93].

That is a very accurate portrayal of the “guest worker” system of the contemporary welfare state in Mises’ native Austria, as well as in other socialist and redistributionist systems. The “guest workers” are forced to pay social security taxes to finance the welfare state, but do not themselves qualify for benefits.

The canonical classical liberal rights to life, liberty, and property are universal, in the sense that they can, at least in principle, be enjoyed by *every* human being; in the term made popular by Manchester University philosopher Hillel Steiner (1994), they are “compossible.” But “welfare rights” are of a different sort; they are particular, entitling this person to so much housing, medical care, or other benefits, and obligating that person to pay so much in taxes or forced labor. In practice, welfare rights stop at the border. On a theoretical level, socialists and welfare statists have a bit of a problem: how to justify as “human rights” claims that are not applicable to all humans, but only to those who share the accident of being members of a non-voluntary group. The only solution short of worldwide redistribution through a world state is to jettison cosmopolitanism entirely and to boldly retreat to the primitive tribalism that characterizes premodern societies.

In the process of abandoning cosmopolitanism and embracing nationalism, supporters of welfare statism and socialism put every civilized value and every liberal institution at risk. Miller claims that an “ethical particularist” such as himself can endorse “basic rights” (although he never says how or why they should) but goes on to note,

The basic rights and the obligations that correspond to them are overlain by the special responsibilities that we have as members of these communities. Moreover, in each community there will be a specific understanding of the needs and interests of members which generate obligations on the part of other members. . . . Thus in one national community (the Republic of Ireland, for example) religious education may be regarded as a shared need which should properly be funded by the community as a whole, whereas in another (the United States for example) it may be seen as a private matter which should be left to each person to consider, and to provide for their children as they saw fit [p. 74].

In other words, whatever “basic rights” individuals may have (for which Miller gives no arguments), the state may still legitimately coerce religious dissenters to support the state religion. If the right to religious dissent is not a basic right, it is not clear what is.

In this book Miller does not seem to recognize just how dangerous to civilized values his appeal to nationalism is. He neatly sidesteps the dangers of nationalism by pointing out that “the aim of this book is by no means to offer a blanket defence of nationalism, but to discriminate between defensible and indefensible versions of the principle of nationality” (p. 40). Thus, the nationalism that Miller has in mind is by definition not an indefensible—or “bad”—nationalism. The late Ernest Gellner,

also a keen student of nationalism, noted in his *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* that enthusiasts for socialism tend to hide a normative element in their definition of socialism: "They do not use the term 'socialism' as a neutral term merely designating a specific set of social arrangements. Rather, they use it as a term whose primary constituent is the notion that it is *good*. They may not know precisely what it is, but they do know that it is good" (Gellner 1994: 151). Thus, if a putatively socialist regime generated some bad consequences, then it was not really socialist, after all.

David Miller has now applied a similar approach to nationalism; he favors good nationalism and opposes bad nationalism. That he does not seem to appreciate the dangers of the move he makes is evidenced by a remarkable characterization of the problem in his earlier essay on "The Ethical Significance of Nationality" that appeared in the journal *Ethics*; he cites as part of the reason for the distrust of nationalism among many thinkers "the 20th-century experience of rampant nationalism, an experience distasteful to liberals and the Left alike." (Miller 1988: 653). To describe the Holocaust, the slaughterhouse of the Balkans, or the Rape of Nanking as "distasteful" indicates how little even a fundamentally decent man such as David Miller seems to appreciate the dangers of nationalism.

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## Whither Socialism?

Joseph E. Stiglitz  
Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994, 338 pp.

For more than two decades, Joseph Stiglitz has produced some of the most important work in the new information economics and New